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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 001471

SIPDIS

NEA/ARP JHARRIS AND JBERNDT

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TAGS: PGOV PINR SA
SUBJECT: PRINCE MANSUR ASSUMES MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS MINISTRY
FROM HIS FATHER

REF: A. 09 RIYADH 1434
¶B. 09 RIYADH 295

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Susan L. Ziadeh for 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY & COMMENT

¶1. (C) As had been expected, 81-year old Prince Mit'eb bin
Abdulaziz resigned from his position as Minister of Municipal
and Rural Affairs on November 2. He was replaced by his son,
Mansur, in an illustration of the Al Saud's gradual and
risk-averse approach to transferring power to the grandsons
of the founding King Abdulaziz. The US-educated prince had
been effectively running the ministry since his appointment
in 2006. As Chairman of the Kingdom's Municipal Elections
Commission, Prince Mansur will play a key role in Saudi
Arabia's political development. His views on the role of
government (to lead change), elections (important to
maintaining stability), and the role of women (fundamentally
different than in the US) suggest that the so-called "next
generation" of Al Saud leaders will be as concerned with
mitigating the effects of change as the current generation.
End summary & comment.

MAYOR OF SAUDI ARABIA

¶2. (C) As had been expected for some time, 81-year old Prince
Mit'eb bin Abdulaziz (the third-most senior son of King
Abdulaziz after the King and Crown Prince) resigned his
position as Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs (MOMRA)
on November 2. The King appointed the minister's son, Deputy
Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs Prince Mansur bin
Mit'eb, to replace him. Despite its sleepy-sounding title,
the ministry is a powerful one, since it is in charge of
public works such as the multi-billion dollar Mecca/Medinah
monorail project, and city zoning. One longtime expat
recently observed that the former Minister was the "go-to
man" for rezoning, critical to the success of many commercial
ventures. (Comment: Mit'eb was widely believed to be corrupt.
End comment.) Oddly, the Ministry issues licenses for
internet cafes, and Ministry officials recently provoked
controversy through a campaign to close down "unlicensed"
women's sports facilities. Finally, the ministry supervises
municipal elections, first held in 2005 and lately postponed
for two years while the SAG "studies" a new charter (ref b).

A "MODERN" PRINCE?

¶3. (C) Prince Mansur is the third grandson of founder-King Abdulaziz to become a full minister, though at least a dozen others hold ministerial-equivalent rank. A long-standing contact of the Embassy, Mansur is an interesting study in the "modern" Al Saud prince. Born in 1952, he holds a Ph.D. from George Washington University in Public Administration and was a faculty member at King Saud University's Department of Public Administration. He was appointed Chairman of the General Commission for Municipal Elections in late 2004, and Deputy Minister in 2006.

¶4. (C) Earlier this year, Prince Mansur had a wide-ranging conversation with Emboffs about the difficulties that needed to be surmounted to hold a second round of municipal elections, which included the role of the councils themselves, and the voting age. His comments suggested he shared the Al-Saud preoccupation for stability and preserving the Kingdom's particular Islamic identity, though he believed that ensuring prosperity and broadening citizen participation in local affairs were needed to maintain stability. He described Saudi Arabia as lacking the political maturity to resolve political differences without recourse to violence. Finally, he firmly rejected the notion that political development required the participation of women; such "secular" ideas were "not fundamental to our (Islamic) society," he insisted.

GOVERNMENT SHOULD LEAD CHANGE

¶5. (C) Mansur posited that "change was a part of life, and the choice of government is either to evolve or face revolution." The Saudi Government's "first role" was to lead

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change. However, stability was required for society to evolve without violence and unwanted change. Mansur noted that many in Saudi Arabia were "relieved" by the election of Barack Obama to the U.S. Presidency, and encouraged by his early outreach to the Muslim world. Many Saudis were tired of and "feared the Bush administration and its efforts to impose American values" upon Saudi Arabia.

¶6. (C) The second role of government was "to provide equity" by ensuring education, security, and other goods and services for those who cannot afford them. However, Mansur noted that the problem for Saudi Arabia was defining who the "poor" were. Because there was no income tax in Saudi Arabia, there was no way to tell who were "less well off" and hence help those in need.

MUNICIPAL COUNCILS KEY TO STABILITY

¶7. (C) Mansur argued that Saudi Arabia was a "transitional society," in contrast to the United States, which he characterized as a politically mature society where differences of opinion could be resolved without violence. The Saudi municipal councils were intended as a means to gradually expand political participation and provide venues for debate and addressing grievances.

WOMEN NEED NOT APPLY

¶8. (C) The foundation of Saudi Arabia was Islam, while the foundation of the United States was "secularism," according to Mansur. He argued that Islam defined the role of women differently than did "secularism." Issues such as women driving were "not fundamental to our society," in contrast to the U.S. where it is believed to be a "fundamental right." Hence, Saudi and American views of the role of women would "never be the same."
ZIADEH